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SOLDIERS FROM V CORPS ARMOR BATTALION WORK TO STREAMLINE BALAD CITY COUNCIL

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FORWARD OPERATING BASE PALIWODA, Iraq — Soldiers of V Corps' 1st

Battalion, 77th Armor, 1st Infantry Division, have helped city council members here get a lot of projects off the ground during their deployment here. They've also helped to strengthen local government.

"Our goal is to make it more like the city councils in the States," said 1st Lt. Martin Rafter, unit development officer. "Each city has one city council, and they'll fall under a district council."

During meetings representatives from each district of Balad discuss projects of benefit to the communities. The council has chosen subcommittees to look at specific areas such as schools, health care, electricity and roads. Once the council members agree on a project they bring their idea to coalition civil affairs teams, who help with financing.

"We don't go out and look for projects," said Capt. Jason Goodfriend, civil affairs officer. "They (the councils) vote on what they need and they look to us for funding."

The Americans also keep council members from distractions such as arguments and irrelevant discussion, remind them they are there to represent the people, and help them develop and become more efficient, Rafter said.

"We determine how they will have certain people do certain jobs -- such as who will be the chairman and so on," he added.

"Two of our four local councils now have local civil charters," Goodfriend said. "They have taken the transitional administrative law and pretty much brought it down to their level. They have written, ratified and emplaced it so they now have systems that are actual law, which is a great thing to see."

The Soldiers also see themselves as mentors to the council members.

"Everything we do is a partnership," Goodfriend added. "It begins with civil process, with a civil government finding out what they need in their communities, and being able help the people they represent."

